

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATION, OF THE HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE CONCERNING H.R. 586, A BILL TO PROVIDE FOR CERTAIN IMPROVEMENTS TO THE DENALI NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE IN THE STATE OF ALASKA, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

May 9, 2013

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 586, a bill that provides for certain improvements to the Denali National Park and Preserve in the State of Alaska, and for other purposes.

The Department supports with an amendment Section 2 of H.R. 586, which would authorize the Secretary of the Interior (Secretary) to issue permits for micro-hydro projects in a limited area of the Kantishna Hills in Denali National Park (Park) and authorize a land exchange between the National Park Service (NPS) and Doyon Tourism, Inc. (Doyon). The Department has no objection to Section 3 of the bill, which would authorize the Secretary to issue right-of-way permits for a natural gas transmission pipeline in non-wilderness areas within the boundary of the Park. The Department also has no objection to Section 4 of the bill, which would designate the Talkeetna Ranger Station as the Walter Harper Talkeetna Ranger Station.

Kantishna Hills Micro-Hydro Projects and Land Exchange

Section 2 of the bill would authorize the issuance of permits for micro-hydro projects, which will reduce the use of fossil fuels in the park, lessen the chance of fuel spills along the park road and at the Kantishna lodges, lower the number of non-visitor vehicle trips over the park road, lessen the noise and emissions from diesel generators in the Moose Creek valley, and support clean energy projects and sustainable practices while ensuring that appropriate review and environmental compliance protects all park resources.

Doyon Tourism, Inc., a subsidiary of Alaska Native Corporation Doyon, Ltd., has requested permits from the NPS to install a micro-hydroelectric project on Eureka Creek, near its Kantishna Roadhouse. The NPS supports the intent of this project; however, neither the Secretary nor the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) has the statutory authority to issue permits for portions of hydroelectric projects within national parks or monuments. We believe that the authorization contained in this legislation is necessary to enable the NPS to allow this micro-hydroelectric project within the Park.

The Kantishna Roadhouse, at the end of the 92-mile-long Denali park road, has been in business for 28 years, hosts approximately 10,000 guests per summer, and currently uses an on-site 100 kilowatt (KW) diesel generator to provide power for the facility. The proposed hydroelectric installation would reduce use of the diesel generator at the lodge. Currently, delivery of diesel fuel to the lodge requires a tanker truck and trailer to be driven the entire length of the Denali park road. Noted for its undeveloped character, the road is unpaved for 77 miles of its 92-mile length, crosses high mountain passes without guardrails, and is just 1 to 1½ lanes wide with

pullouts. The road is famous for wildlife viewing opportunities and in order to protect wildlife as well as the road's scenic wilderness character, vehicle traffic is limited. Reducing the amount of diesel fuel hauled over this road in tanker trucks protects park resources by reducing the risk of accident or spill, and simultaneously reduces overall vehicle use of the road.

Eureka Creek is a 4-mile-long stream that drains a 5 square-mile watershed and discharges about 15 cubic feet per second (cfs) during the summer. Most of the floodplain has been disturbed by past placer mining, but no mining claims exist on the creek now and no other landowners besides Doyon and the NPS own any property near this floodplain. The project would include an at-grade water intake, with no impoundment, about one mile upstream of where Eureka Creek crosses the park road.

Camp Denali, another lodge in the Kantishna Hills, is within the area addressed by this legislation. Camp Denali opened in 1952 and the owners installed a micro-hydro generator system prior to the 1978 Presidential proclamation that included the Kantishna Hills as a part of what is now the Park. After 1978, Camp Denali became a private in-holding surrounded by the Park, and found that parts of its micro-hydro power system were within the Park, a situation that the NPS lacks the authority to permit or retain. This legislation would allow the NPS and the owners of Camp Denali to work out permit conditions for those parts of the existing hydro project that are now on park land. Besides the Kantishna Roadhouse and Camp Denali, two other lodges in the Kantishna Hills may pursue similar projects in the future and thus would benefit from the authority granted in this legislation.

Section 2 requires the Secretary to complete National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance not later than 180 days after the date on which an applicant submits an application for the issuance of a permit. We recommend that the bill be amended to avoid putting an undue burden on the NPS to respond in the 180-day time frame, particularly if the initial application is incomplete or inaccurate, as sometimes happens. We would be happy to work with the committee on this amendment.

In addition to authorizing micro-hydro projects, Section 2 would authorize a land exchange. Doyon owns 18 acres on the patented Galena mining claim in the Kantishna Hills and would like to exchange that acreage for park land in the Kantishna Hills of equal value near its other properties. The NPS would also like to pursue this exchange to consolidate land holdings in the area. Existing land exchange authority under the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) and other legislation is sufficient to effect this exchange. Thus, while we believe that this exchange authority is not needed for legal purposes, we support its inclusion as an expression of Congressional intent.

Natural Gas Pipeline Right-of-Way Authorization

Section 3 of this legislation would authorize the Secretary to issue right-of-way permits for a natural gas transmission pipeline in non-wilderness areas within the boundary of the Park. The potential owners and operators of such a pipeline have not, at this time, determined whether such a line carrying natural gas to south-central Alaska is financially feasible, nor have they determined the best route for a pipeline. This legislation provides flexibility for the backers of a proposed pipeline, and provides assurance to the NPS that the NEPA analysis will be completed before any permit for work in the Park would be issued by the Secretary.

Section 3 would also provide authority for the Secretary to permit distribution lines and related equipment within the park for the purpose of providing a natural gas supply to the Park. We have no objection to this provision, but we want to advise the committee that at this time no decisions have been made about the financial or engineering feasibility, nor the exact configuration of equipment needed to facilitate tapping the larger line to allow local use of natural gas in or near the Park.

Redesignation of the Talkeetna Ranger Station

Section 4 would designate the Park's South District Ranger Station in Talkeetna as the Walter Harper Talkeetna Ranger Station. Mr. Harper grew up in Alaska and, as a young man, served as an interpreter and guide for the far-flung ministry of Hudson Stuck, an Episcopal archdeacon. He joined Stuck on an arduous trip in 1913 to reach the summit of North America's highest peak. For nearly three months, the group moved slowly south from Fairbanks and into the high mountains of the Alaska Range. On June 7, 1913, Walter Harper, 21, became the first man to set foot on the summit of Denali, the Athabascan name for the peak, meaning the High One.

Since 1913, thousands of climbers have aimed for the summit. Unlike Mr. Harper, who traveled south from Fairbanks into the Alaska Range, the vast majority of climbers today begin their expeditions with an airplane ride out of Talkeetna on the south side of the Park. The NPS ranger station there serves as an orientation center for climbers and other visitors to the Denali region. The community is proud of its varied history as a railroad town, a jumping off point for miners, and in the past several decades as the take-off point for climbing expeditions.

The Department's position on naming the ranger station for Walter Harper strikes a balance between recognizing Mr. Harper's historic accomplishment and upholding the NPS policy on commemorative works, which discourages the naming of park structures for a person unless the association between the park and the person is of exceptional importance. Mr. Harper's achievement occurred before the Park was established and therefore, there was no direct association between the two.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.